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PARIS CLEARS AIDES IN ATTACK ON SHIP

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PARIS, Aug. 28 — A special French Government investigator has concluded that the Cabinet bears no responsibility for the sinking of a ship belonging to Greenpeace, the antinuclear and environmentalist group.

The vessel, the Rainbow Warrior, was sunk by explosives July 10 while berthed in Auckland, New Zealand, killing a Greenpeace photographer. The vessel had been scheduled to lead a flotilla of protest ships to the French nuclear testing area at Mururoa Atoll, near Tahiti.

The investigator's report, made public today, says all six French citizens held or sought by the New Zealand police in the attack were intelligence agents and had been in New Zealand to gather information about Greenpeace plans.

But the investigator, Bernard Tricot, said he believed that the six, including two awaiting trial in New Zealand on charges of murder and arson, had played no role in the sinking.

"I would say, given the present state of the information I have, that I do not believe in any official French responsibility," Mr. Tricot said. "All that I have seen and heard gives the certitude that at the Government level, no decision was taken to damage the Rainbow Warrior."

The phrase "Government level" was taken to refer to the ministerial level of the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Laurent Fabius. It was Mr. Fabius who had asked Mr. Tricot on Aug. 8 to carry out an investigation after President Francois Mitterrand called for a "rigorous inquiry without delay."

The report, in the form of a letter addressed to Mr. Fabius, adds yet another twist to the incident, which has dominated attention in France since allegations were made several weeks ago that French agents had been involved in the sinking. A motive would have been to prevent Greenpeace interference in French nuclear testing.

The New Zealand police, by indicting two French citizens carrying false Swiss passports and linking them to the French intelligence service, fueled the belief that French officials had been responsible for the operation.

Mr. Tricot's report confirms that the arrested couple, who went by the false names Sophie-Claire Turenge and Alain-Jacques Turenge, were indeed French agents and that the four others wanted by New Zealand were intelligence officers as well.

Intelligence Yacht Back in France

They include a woman with the false name Frédérique Bonlieu, who infiltrated Greenpeace before the attack, and three crew members aboard the Ouvéa, a yacht that had been chartered by the French intelligence service and that disappeared a week after the Auckland incident.

Mr. Tricot, who was a chief of staff in the Elysée under President Charles de Gaulle, reveals that the Ouvéa with the three aboard had been secretly returned to France by the intelligence service. The crew members presented themselves today at Paris police headquarters and were then released pending receipt of further information from the New Zealand police. They were identified as three frogmen of the intelligence service — Chief Petty Officer Roland Verge, Sgt. J. M. Bartelo and Sgt. Gerald Andries.

But Mr. Tricot, though qualifying his report by saying that all the information was not available to him, contended that the six agents had merely followed instructions to collect information about Greenpeace and eventually to find further ways of infiltrating the organization.

French Opposition Is Skeptical

The report was promptly attacked by the French opposition as incomplete or unconvincing.

Jean-Claude Gaudin, president of the Union for French Democracy, a rightist party, said of Mr. Tricot, "Because he did not have the real means of carrying out an investigation, his report does not answer the questions the French people are asking."

The report traces the history of French concern with Greenpeace's activities, particularly the search for information regarding a plan calling for the Rainbow Warrior to launch several small boats that would have attempted to land near the nuclear testing ground.

Mr. Tricot said the dispatch of the six agents to New Zealand to gather the information had been approved by Defense Minister Charles Hernu and by Gen. Jean Saulnier, chief military aide to President Mitterrand.

The New Zealand police have said that they have evidence and witnesses showing that the two agents going by the name Turenge participated in the sinking of the ship.

Mr. Tricot, in dealing with a portion of the evidence made public in New Zealand, said that while the evidence is not negligible, it does not constitute proof of guilt.

French Agents Called Discipline

His report says that the six agents were highly disciplined and unlikely to have departed from the intelligence-gathering mission defined by their superiors.

"It seems unlikely that the Turenges participated either directly or indirectly in installing mines under the hull of the Rainbow Warrior," the report says.

Mr. Tricot identified the Turenge couple as Capt. Dominique Prieur and Comdr. Alain Mafart of the French intelligence service.

He said Captain Prieur had been suffering from back trouble that would have disqualified her from participating in the frogman-style operation in which explosive charges were attached to the ship's hull. Commander Mafart, according to Mr. Tricot, had once been a combat frogman but was transferred to other duties two years ago and would not have been a "reasonable" choice to carry out the attack.

In addition, Mr. Tricot said, the fact that the Turenges had openly visited the harbor of Auckland before the attack, as reported by the New Zealand police, made their participation in the bombing unlikely since agents preparing such an operation would normally have taken pains to remain unobserved.

The report contends that skilled agents would not have left behind such conspicuous evidence as divers' oxygen tanks with French markings. It argues that the apparent clumsiness suggested that the operation could have been carried out by the agents of another country in such a way as to implicate France.